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MEMORANDUM

THE MALAISE OF SOVIET SOCIETY

1. In recent years there has been a growing feeling of malaise in most sections and at most levels of Soviet society. People simply no longer believe in the Party. They do not think in terms of problems being overcome by changes in the leadership, but rather that the whole party system has to be done away with. Young people even say as much in the presence of Brezhnev's grandchildren. Only careerists are willing to talk about their faith in the system as if they believe what they are saying.

2. Over the years, the gradual increase in corruption and theft by party officials has encouraged more and more people to see what they can get out of the system for themselves--with ever decreasing concern about the legality of what they are doing. This malaise had been reflected in both the growth and the pattern of Soviet crime. Certain parts of Moscow and other big cities are no longer considered safe after dark. There has been a sharp increase in the number of muggings by teenagers and the number of murders committed in general. The authorities are worried by the fact that the proportion of murders committed without a known motive has now risen to 80 percent.

3. Robberies from private flats used to be virtually unknown in the Soviet Union. Now, however, people are so worried that they install double doors and burglar alarms (wired via the telephone system) in their homes. Despite such precautions the apartments of violinist David Oistrakh and other leading artists have been burglarized, as have those of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (and even KGB) officials. Public concern has been heightened by revelations that some of the militia, which control the burglar alarms, have been working in conjunction with professional thieves.

4. There has also been a steady rise in the number of armed robberies of big stores, jewelry shops, banks and couriers delivering wages to big enterprises. Such robberies are now frequent enough occurrences for them to be mentioned in novels, which they never were before.

5. Nowadays no place seems to be safe from thieving fingers--even the KGB Headquarters in Lubyanka. Yuriy Andropov, KGB Chief, would still like to know who stole six fine fur hats belonging to important visitors from the hat stand outside his office in the latter 1970's. (Fearing that more than hats might leave the inner sanctum of the Lubyanka unnoticed, Andropov then ordered a high security "screen" to be built around his suite of offices).

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6. Despite this malaise there are few, if any, signs that crime has acquired a distinctly political focus. There is little political graffiti to be seen and such armed attacks as there have been on party officials have usually been in the republics. In the short term terrorist attacks are more likely to come from national minorities (e.g. the bombing of the Moscow Metro by three Armenians) than from European Russians themselves.

7. The story of the Soviet leadership's recent efforts to cover up corruption in high places and details of some of the things which have been going on in the militia provide vivid vignettes of the present state of Soviet society.

THE DISCONTENTED GROUPS

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

8. The serious food shortages in recent years have added to the discontent of the working class with their generally low standard of living, the shortages of consumer goods, the "failures" of the system and the resentment they feel about the privileges enjoyed by senior party officials.

9. The authorities have long felt that alcohol was an essential opiate for the Soviet people in general, and the working class in particular. People are well aware that the authorities make reusable caps for the bottles of vodka which are exported, but not those sold in the home market. Once a Soviet man opens his bottle he is expected to finish it. In 1971 a secret party directive went so far as to recommend that local authorities should open liquor shops close to the entrances of all major plants. At the same time the authorities launched an official campaign against alcoholism. In the recent past much official concern has been expressed about the increase in alcoholism in the Soviet Union, but the authorities have not really tried to combat the problem. Prices have gone up, but supplies are still good and are consumed just as quickly as before.

10. Workers can often be heard saying that they do not care whether they are employed by a capitalist "boss" or the state, so long as the money is good--and there is something worth buying with it. In the past workers said such things in public when drunk. Now they frequently say them when sober.

11. The more skilled the worker, the less fear he has of voicing his discontent. If the KGB suggests a skilled worker should lose his job because of what he has said, the factory manager and the party secretary are likely to defend him because they cannot replace him easily.

12. Discontent, aggravated by food shortages, has already led to many brief strikes. The two major strikes of 1981 were at Gorkiy and Togliatti. By the spring of 1981 meat and milk shops in Gorkiy had been closed for months. Unrest and tension had been growing. Without warning stoppages broke out one day in several separate parts of the Gorkiy plant. Within a short while the strike had spread and production was at a standstill. The next day the meat and milk shops, miraculously well stocked, reopened.

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Production restarted at the plant without delay. There were no arrests and at the time the authorities made no attempts to find strike leaders. The main interest, as usual, was hushing up the matter as quickly as possible.

13. Despite the authorities' efforts a similar pattern of events soon unfolded in the nearby major car plant at Togliatti. Again the workers were bought off with improved food supplies.

14. Efforts to modernize industrial practices have also run into difficulty. At a number of plants the introduction of piece rates has been badly handled. Productivity has usually shot up quickly in response to the incentives of the new system. This has made the authorities think they set the piece rate too high. They think that they will still be able to get much of the increase in production they want even if they pay a lower piece rate. Cuts in piece rates, however, have usually led to strikes. One of the most important of these strikes took place a few years ago at the tractor plant at Volgograd.

AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

15. The great majority of agricultural workers want collective farms (the Kolkhoz), in effect to be broken up--at least into small cooperatives, if not independent farms. They argue that only such a reorganization, together with a freer market for their produce, will give them the type of incentives they need to increase their output significantly.

16. Recent regional experiments have shown production can be increased significantly when small groups are allowed to farm land for their own profit (i.e. the Zveno/"Link"/System). The party leadership, however, has rejected the idea that Soviet agriculture should be remodelled on these lines. They are simply terrified by the prospects of people having an independent economic base, free to a large extent from party control.

17. During the past couple of years state help for private plots has increased and price controls have been removed on sales at the officially sanctioned private markets. These changes, however, have only produced a slight improvement in supplies from that sector. Most farmers have found, of course, that they need to sell less to earn the same amount of money. As the choice of goods they can buy is not great, they have little incentive to earn more cash.

18. The food program to 1990, approved by the Central Committee Plenum on 24 May 1982, is unlikely to produce a significant increase in output. There will still be far too much bureaucracy interfering with farming decisions and price incentives will not be great enough for the agricultural workers. In these circumstances the investments planned under the program will neither be very productive, nor will they really overcome some of the main structural problems of Soviet agriculture.

19. One of the key problems of Soviet agriculture stems from the fact that rural life in much of the country is very disagreeable. In European Russia, for example, collective farms are usually unprofitable and rundown.

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The majority of young people have drifted to the cities. It will be a long time before conditions improve sufficiently to encourage young people to stay on the farms, let alone bring them back from the cities. After all industry, too, is eager to get more labor.

20. In the Ukraine the situation is somewhat better. Agriculture there has been fairly profitable for many years. This has made it possible to improve the quality of rural life. As a result a good proportion of young people have remained on the land--which in turn has helped production and profitability. But retaining manpower and winning it back are very different matters.

THE INTELLIGENTSIA

21. At present the most influential members of the intelligentsia are the writers. Many of them are, in reality, both subtle and profound critics of many aspects of the Soviet system. They not only find ways to criticize the negative side of Soviet society, but they also articulate the discontent of a large number of people against the Soviet system as a whole.

22. Influential writers today tend to be against the party, for less antagonism between classes in Soviet society and for a greater pride in Russian nationalism. The KGB watches such writers closely, but most of their books are still published. The leading members of this group include Vladimir Soloukhin, Valentin Pikul, and Valentin Rasputin, as were Gil Lepatov (who wrote critically about local party officials), Vasili Shukshin and Vladimир Vysotsky (the very popular poet/singer) who kept on protesting until their recent deaths.

23. Soloukhin's novel about a peasant who wished to restore a 13th century church conveys well the way these writers get across their message. The peasant in this novel feels so strongly about the importance of saving his village church from delapidation and collapse that he is willing to restore it himself. He gives up drink to save the money to buy the materials he needs to supplement his own building skills. All he wants from the authorities is permission to restore the church (which for him is symbolic of Russia and its historic greatness). No one in the local administration or the local party or the next level up is willing to give him the go ahead. In the end this good peasant, frustrated and enraged, throws away his tools, gets drunk and curses Soviet society.

24. Pikul, in his books, has continued to develop his theme that Russians should be proud of their history. Generally speaking, he argues, Russia had great Tsars, good rulers and good political leaders before the October revolution. This is one of the themes of his book "At the Limit," which dealt with the last period of Tsarism. Suslov was enraged by the fact that Pikul did not even make the slightest reference to the Bolsheviks. But Pikul still writes and his books are published. One way or another he conveys the same message.

25. Among the non-literary intelligentsia Sakharov still commands much respect. His academic standing, his personal history and the fact that he remains in the country tend to override any criticism people may voice about

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his links with the West or some of the advice he has given the West (e.g. his call to the West to increase its military strength). In some intellectual circles Sakharov's confinement in Gorkiy is often referred to by the words "Lenin in exile."

26. The dissident movement itself enjoys little public support, even in intellectual circles. The writers referred to above and their supporters feel that the Soviet Union must solve its own problems, in its own way, and in its own good time. The public dissidents are disliked because of their links with the West. Moreover, it is generally felt that these groups (for example, the Helsinki Monitoring Group) are little more than devices which Jews unable to leave the Soviet Union use to further their own cause, not that of "Russia."

THE MILITIA (POLICE)

27. The militia is one of the least discontented, yet most disliked, groups in Soviet society. The reason is simple--the militia is doing so well through corruption. These days militiamen are mainly former soldiers from the provinces who have come to Moscow and Leningrad, in particular, in the hope of cashing in on the local corruption. They have become brazen enough to take bribes from almost anyone, even from known KGB officers.

28. The most corrupt group in the militia is the one responsible for investigations into the theft of state property). These militiamen have numerous opportunities to take bribes and to ask for them. They have become deeply involved in the activities they are supposed to be stopping. Corruption in the militia has become such a serious matter that the KGB is trying to persuade the party to let them have the responsibility for investigating theft of state property.

29. The militia is also involved in organized crime, including murder. At the lower end of the scale, the militia is involved in robberies from homes of some of the more prosperous Soviet citizens where they have installed the burglar alarms (via the telephone system). At the other end of the scale, groups of militia have been discovered murdering well-to-do people for their apparel and personal possessions.

30. The most infamous case took place in 1978/80. During that period a number of people had disappeared without trace. The KGB got involved when one of Andropov's senior colleagues (his personal adviser on personnel matters) joined the list of those missing. A massive KGB operation was mounted to discover what had happened to him. After many months the KGB discovered a group of 25 militiamen, headed by a Lieutenant Colonel, which had murdered more than 20 people for their possessions and had then effectively disposed of the bodies. Other similar groups were exposed later.

31. As a result of these exposures and other incidents, relations are now extremely bad between the KGB and the militia. If ever arrested by the militia, KGB officers have instructions to conceal their true function. The reason is that the militia is believed to be so keen to embarrass the KGB that they will even fabricate the evidence if they think they can get away with doing so. A more important reflection of the leadership's view of the militia is that the KGB expects that it will soon be allowed to recruit agents in the militia, something which it has been forbidden to do for many years.

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THE KGB

32. Within the KGB there is a strong feeling that "something needs to be done to put this country in order." The KGB is particularly disgruntled by its inability to take effective action against those it believes are undermining "society," particularly dissidents and the party itself. Legally, the KGB has difficulty in stopping the expression of anti-regime sentiments. A man, even in the Soviet Union, is entitled to his personal opinion. He only commits an offense when he tries to encourage others to pursue anti-Soviet activities. Skilled workers are usually protected by their employer and the local party secretary, almost regardless of what the KGB says. The KGB resents having to "caution" dissidents, instead of being able to take executive action against them.

33. The other problems connected with dissidence have also been pre-occupying the KGB. For some years the Soviet authorities have been worried about the use which might be made in periods of social unrest of the sizeable amounts of unauthorized weapons in private hands and the illegal presses used for printing Samizdat.

34. Although the KGB has had some success in collecting weapons, greater quantities of arms continue to be smuggled out of arms factories (e.g. at Tula and Kovrov). Most of these weapons are small arms, but the KGB believes that some heavier items, still in working order, have remained concealed since the second world war, mainly in the western part of the Soviet Union and the Caucasus. Tracking down these weapons has remained one of the KGB's top priorities since the mid 1970's.

35. The KGB has had no difficulty in monitoring the circulation of Samizdat publications and the authorities have not been unduly concerned by the tone of their contents. What has been more disturbing for the KGB (and for the authorities) is the little success it has had in locating the illegal printing presses. The authorities fear that in more troubled times these presses will be used to print inflammatory leaflets, posters, etc.

36. Even more resentment in the KGB is caused by the Party's privileges and the abuse of its powers. Party secretaries at the raikom (district) level and other party employees of that rank and above enjoy extensive privileges, including access to special food shops. Compared to their party colleagues the KGB, the Army and the government, even though they are also party members and hold equally senior positions, only receive small perks.

37. The KGB knows a lot about corruption and straight theft from state enterprises. It has great difficulty, however, in getting charges brought against those concerned for the simple reason that they are protected by their party position or their connections. Rarely is the Party willing to do more than chide the offenders. The Party, KGB officers often say, wants to maintain its isolation from society and protect itself from prying eyes. It also wishes to avoid its laundry being washed in public. Scandal is to be avoided if at all possible.

38. If the KGB acquires incriminating evidence against a party official (or the close relative of a senior party member) it is under strict instructions to take no further action and to report the matter directly to the head of the KGB. During the many years Andropov headed the KGB he claimed that he would deal with the matter "personally" and in his party capacity as a member of the Politburo. It was noticeable that despite the evidence he received rarely did anything ever happen to the accused. Many KGB officers feel that this sense of "discretion" is one of the main reasons Andropov is acceptable to the Party.

THE ARMY

39. There is widespread belief among Army officers that the Party has shown itself incapable of running the country--either by Stalinism or through reform. Some middle ranking officers, including lecturers at the General Staff Academy, go so far as to tell friends that sooner or later someone will lead a coup d'etat against the Party. The Army dislikes and resents the Party because of the general state of the country, the Party's involvement in corruption and theft and because party officials' privileges are much greater than those enjoyed by Army officers of equal standing.

40. Although the Army wishes to see change, it is generally opposed to the idea of a return to Stalinist policies. One of the main reasons for this is the Army's memories of the purges of the 1930's. The Army, and particularly the GRU (Soviet Military Intelligence), has never forgotten the enthusiasm with which the KGB (then known as the NKVD) had pursued its role as "the armed detachment of the party." Moreover, the Army dislikes what it views as the close symbiotic relationship between the KGB and the Party.

41. For all of the Soviet dislike of the state of affairs in Poland, many Soviet Army officers (including some senior officers) view with a certain interest the role which Premier Wojciech Jaruzelski and the Polish Armed Forces are now playing in the country's affairs.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

42. Until a few years ago many of the younger officials believed that it was still possible for the Soviet Union to follow the path of gradual economic reform which in due course would widen the margins of cultural freedom and political debate. Few people still believe such hopes can be realized. Within Soviet society, these younger officials see widespread discontent with the Party from the industrial and agricultural workers, the KGB, the Army and the intellectuals. Moreover, they see a party which seems incapable of overcoming the problems which it faces because it is preoccupied with preserving its own position.

43. In 1920 Lenin had written (in "Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder") that: "only when the 'lower classes' do not want the old, and the 'upper classes' cannot continue in the old way, can the revolution be victorious." Many of the younger officials are beginning to feel that the Soviet Union is moving closer and closer to such a situation.

CONCLUSIONS

44. There is little prospect that after Brezhnev leaves the political scene the Soviet leadership will embark upon a more systematic program of reform.

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45. In some respects the Party itself has become one of the discontented sections of Soviet society. It still has its privileges, but it is less sure about how much authority it can command. Economic problems pose the most serious threat to the Party's position.

46. The influence of detente and the general erosion of discipline in Soviet society have led to growing criticism of Soviet institutions and the regime in general. To embark on reform in any circumstances would be to court disaster. In Eastern Europe some experimentation can be tolerated because if the situation gets out of hand there, Soviet troops are on hand to reassert control; if things go wrong in the Soviet Union itself, however, no one will protect the party.

47. Given the tensions within Soviet society a return to a more Stalinist policy is quite possible. Andropov's recent appointment as a party secretary will facilitate such a move, but it is not dependent upon him replacing Brezhnev as general Secretary.

48. If more draconian domestic policies are pursued the main features will probably be:

- A. A propaganda campaign claiming that the Soviet Union is seriously threatened by the West.
- B. Severe penalties for theft of state property and associated corruption (e.g. food destined for state shops is often sold in cooperative shops, with the connivance of the state shops who take cut of the profits).
- C. Tough KGB measures against any form of anti-socialism.

49. Initially, such draconian measures can win the acceptance, even favor of some discontented elements in Soviet society. In the medium and longer term, however, the measures will lose their impact. The main reason for this is that the Soviet people have become more difficult to control individually and there are now so many of them who are discontented. As draconian measures cannot overcome these problems, discontent will build up and an incident could, at some stage, unleash a crisis.

A PROBLEM BECOMES A CRISIS

50. Many Soviet people believe that industrial unrest could easily lead to clashes with the police and workers being shot. Bloodshed, in turn, could lead to massive and spontaneous demonstrations against the authorities. Large scale protests could not easily be stopped by the authorities quickly buying off the demonstrators with improved food supplies as happened in Gorkiy and Togliatti in 1981. If demonstrations burst out in several places, the authorities would not be able to provide supplies quickly enough to keep everyone happy.

51. A more serious problem for the authorities, however, is the weakening of the cohesion and discipline of Soviet society which has taken place in recent years. This could make it very difficult for the authorities to regain control of the situation.

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52. Faced with widespread demonstrations the Party would have to call in the Army. European conscripts would be most reluctant to fire on other Europeans voicing similar discontents to their own. KGB troops might fire on demonstrators at first, but it is doubtful for how long they would hold the line. The authorities would try, no doubt, to use non-European troops to re-establish order. Given the present structure of the Soviet Army, however, this would not be easy--particularly to move them quickly to the areas where they were needed. The outcome of such clashes would be unpredictable. Bloodshed could soon lead to widespread violence. Faced with social unrest other discontented groups could well turn against the Party--and one of the discontented groups is, after all, the Army. If that happened the Party would have little chance of surviving in its present form.